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THE FIRST FILIPINO ASSEMBLY AND ITS WORK.

BY CHARLES SUMNER LOBINGIER, JUDGE OF THE COURT OF FIRST INSTANCE, MANILA.

ON October 16th last, the United States Philippine Commission, pioneer legislative body of the Archipelago, became the Upper House of the new Philippine Legislature, sharing its powers with an elective Assembly of eighty members, the first to be instituted among a Malay people. The outcome of this novel experiment has been awaited with interest by students of political science and history throughout the world, and many theories and prognostications have been advanced. We are now for the first time in a position to say, not what the Assembly may or will do, but what it actually has done. On June 19th, after holding inaugural, regular and special sessions, it finally adjourned and its record is open to inspection.

The Volume of Legislation.—During the interval of eight months between the opening and closing of the Assembly, seventy-five new acts were passed. Of these, two were enacted by the Commission alone, exercising the exclusive prerogative, which it still retains, of legislating for the non-Christian provinces. A number of others are such as would be classed by a State Legislature as private or special acts, as they relate to particular localities, or, as is true of three, to particular corporations. Compared with a body like the American Congress, which, during a similar period, considers or enacts thousands of laws, the number passed by the Assembly seems exceedingly small. But to judge its work by such a standard would be unfair. In the first place, the field of legislation had already been quite well covered, for the Philippines are anything but a new country in this regard. The Philippine Commission, for the seven years preceding, had been legis-

lating almost continually, and the number of its enactments alone amounted to 1,800—more, probably, than those of most of our newer States. Back of this lay a very considerable body of legislation by the Spaniards, three of whose Codes—Penal, Civil and Commercial—together with much more, have been retained. It was natural that the Assembly should find less occasion for new laws than its members might have anticipated. In the second place, legislation was a new experience for the Filipinos. Practically nothing of the kind had been attempted by them previously, and in consequence much time had to be devoted to organization, learning methods of procedure and the mechanics of legislation. More than two-thirds of the acts were passed during the last month of the session.

Educational Measures.—Of the seventy-three laws approved by the Assembly no less than nine—or one-eighth of the whole, and a much larger proportion of those of general interest—relate to popular education. The very first act was one appropriating \$500,000 for the construction of schoolhouses in the *barrios* (rural districts). This was followed by acts appropriating \$37,500 for the salaries of teachers in such schools, \$25,000 for training, at the Insular Schools of Manila, teachers to be selected from different municipalities throughout the Archipelago, and the general appropriation bill which allowed \$1,650,000 for the Bureau of Education and its teaching staff during the ensuing year, and \$72,500 for the Government Medical School. Besides this, there were acts authorizing the Governor-General, “in his discretion,” to convey public lands, with the buildings thereon, to provinces and municipalities for public school purposes, providing for “popular civico-educational lectures” in the *barrios*, under the supervision of the Director of Education and more directly in charge of municipal teachers, and establishing a Philippine Public Library with provision for the collection and preservation of historical documents. To crown this branch of its work, the Assembly passed, practically without amendment, a bill, introduced by the Secretary of Public Instruction in the Commission and approved by that body, providing for the foundation of a “University of the Philippines.” This measure, modelled on the charters of our State Universities, may well be regarded as the most important work of the first Philippine Legislature. It ought to mark a new era in American educational effort in the Far East, and ultimately

make Manila a centre of university influence for the spread of higher learning and Anglo-Saxon culture throughout Asia. Just as in our State Universities, the observance of "Charter-Day" or "Founders'-Day" is a yearly event, so in future years we may expect the "University of the Philippines" to commemorate June 18th, 1908, as marking the advent of the American public university in the Orient.

Those who have sought, from one motive or another, to delude the American people into the belief that their educational mission in the Archipelago was a failure, and that it was not appreciated or responded to by the Filipinos, will find little comfort in this record of loyal support by the representatives of that people. Of the ten acts above mentioned (including the appropriation bill), all but three originated in the Assembly (being changed by the Commission only in phraseology and form), and those three were passed without opposition. How well does this fact confirm the estimate made by the Philippine Commission, as a result of one of its tours, nearly ten years ago. Their report contained the following statement: "The Commission takes pleasure in recording the fact that it was everywhere and at all times assured, both by friendly Filipinos and by insurgent representatives, that the people of the Islands would cheerfully bear almost any burden of taxation having for its object the provision of funds for a good public-school system."*

Other Legislation.—These acts relating to education form by far the largest class of those passed. Indeed, the number of important laws outside of these was not large. One provides for promoting and maintaining irrigation systems, appropriating \$375,000 therefor, and another is the new employers' liability law. The latter is framed along somewhat the same lines as those which characterize the recent acts of Congress and of certain State Legislatures, but it appears to be more moderate, the limit of recovery, even in case of death, being fixed at \$1,250. The "fellow-servant's" rule at which recent American legislation has been directed was never in vogue in the Philippines.

The attitude of the American press and public in the Islands toward the Assembly has been one of almost uniformly friendly interest and encouragement. Criticisms of certain of its acts have not been wanting, but they have come chiefly from Filipino

* Rep. Phil. Com. (1900), pp. 41, 42.

sources and have proceeded upon party lines. These criticisms have mainly concerned (1) the unseating of two members who, it was claimed, had been lawfully elected and were entitled to their seats; (2) the passage of an act raising the salaries of members to fifteen dollars a day; and (3) the appropriation of \$17,000 to defray the expenses of a delegate to the International Navigation Conference at St. Petersburg. The first was the cause of much bitter strife, both in and out of the Assembly. Regarding the last two measures, it was urged that they were inconsistent with the ante-election demands of economy, especially in view of the fact that the Conference last mentioned was already in session and would be closed before the delegate could reach St. Petersburg. The attitude of the Commission as to these matters was one of non-interference. Its position, apparently, was that, as the revenues were raised in the Philippines, the members of the Assembly should be held responsible to their constituents, and not to the Commission, for appropriations originating in the Lower House.

Some Results.—Those who expected the first Filipino Assembly to be a radical, if not revolutionary, body, devoting its time and efforts to plots and protests against the constituted authorities, have been disappointed. Not only have its members co-operated amicably with those authorities, but their course throughout has shown a genuine appreciation of American achievements in the Philippines and a desire to continue the work so well begun. The first official act of the Assembly, after its organization, was the passage of a joint resolution reciting that:

“The people of the Philippine Islands fully recognize in the action taken by the Government of the United States in creating the said Assembly a proof of its confidence in said people, as well as a continuation of the democratic traditions of the United States;”

and conveying

“to the President of the United States, and through him to the Congress and the people of the United States, their profound sentiments of gratitude and high appreciation of the signal concession made to the people of the Islands of participating directly in the making of the laws which shall govern them.”

But the best expression of this sentiment, after all, is to be found in the character of the work done as well as of that left undone. Few measures were introduced into the Assembly, and

fewer still considered, whose effect would have been to overturn any important feature of the settled American policy. Even measures like the Internal Revenue Law, which met decided opposition at the time of their passage, were left untouched by the Assembly. There could scarcely be a higher tribute to the work and wisdom of those patriotic men who, in the opening years of the present century, first planted American institutions in the Orient, or a clearer demonstration that, in their efforts toward the uplift of the Philippines, the American people have been writing one of the most creditable chapters in their history.

CHARLES SUMNER LOBINGIER.